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ABSTRACT

A number of studies suggest that demographic characteristics may be related to individuals' satisfaction with their work. If gender does relate to job satisfaction, this relationship might be partly explained by a mediating effect of another set of variables--individuals' reasons for working. Because the effect of socialization on work attitudes is likely to develop during adolescence, this study tested the thesis that female and male adolescents would have different reasons for working at part-time jobs, and that these reasons may impact on their job satisfaction. Male (N=361) and female (N=508) high school students who worked at fast food restaurants completed a structured questionnaire assessing demographic characteristics, family background, educational attainment and goals, and attitudes about work and fast food jobs in particular. Subjects described their past jobs and present duties, reasons for working, satisfaction with their job, and skill development. At the bivariate level, gender was found to relate significantly, but to a small degree, to job satisfaction. It was also found that female adolescents were likely to work for different reasons than male adolescents. Females reported working to learn skills or gain work experience more than did males. The relationship between gender and job satisfaction disappeared after controlling for differences in the reason for working, suggesting that gender did not have a direct impact on job satisfaction. Reasons for working did not account for much of the variance in predicting job satisfaction. (Author/NB)

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The Relationship between Gender and Job Satisfaction In High-School Students Employed Part-Time

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Presented at the Annual Meeting of the

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Abstract

A number of studies suggest that demographic characteristics (e.g., gender) may be related to individuals' satisfaction with their work. If gender does relate to job satisfaction, this relationship might be partly explained by a mediating effect of another set of variables – viz., individuals' reasons for working. Because the effect of socialization on work attitudes is likely to develop during adolescence, this study tested the thesis that female and male adolescents would have different reasons for working at part-time jobs, and that these reasons may impact on their job satisfaction. Results were based on 869 high-school students (ages 16-18; 714 white, 155 non-white; 361 males, 508 females) employed part-time at fast food restaurants. At the bivariate level, gender was found to relate (significantly, but to a small degree) to job satisfaction. It was also found that female adolescents were more likely to work for different reasons than male adolescents: Females reported working to learn skills or gain work experience more than males. The relationship between gender and job satisfaction disappeared after controlling for differences in the reasons for working, suggesting that gender did not have a direct impact on job satisfaction. However, the reasons for working also did not account for much of the variance in predicting job satisfaction. Educational policy implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

The number of high school students who work part-time has reached an all-time high. Approximately 75% of high school seniors hold part-time jobs, often earning more than $200 per month (Bachman, 1987, 1982). As in adult jobs, some part-time positions tend to be filled predominately by males (e.g, gas station attendants) while others are filled by females (e.g., food counter workers). Consistent with the adult population, male adolescents work longer hours than their female counterparts and also are paid more (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1983). In addition to these demographic gender differences, it has also been suggested that adult women and men may have different job-related needs which might influence their job attitudes. It is important to examine adolescent part-time workers' motivations, or reasons for working, and satisfaction with their first few jobs since virtually all of them will join the workforce after high school or college graduation.

Job satisfaction is traditionally defined as the attitude that one has toward his or her job -- one's affective response to a job. There is a set of common dimensions to most jobs that can be used to measure job satisfaction better than just a measure of "global job satisfaction." According to Locke (1976), job satisfaction is composed of attitudes toward the job itself, the rewards of the work, context of work, people in the company (e.g., supervisors and co-workers), and people outside the company (e.g., family members). Although job satisfaction has not been found to correlate strongly with job performance, a negative correlation has been found with turnover and absenteeism (Porter & Steers, 1973). Job satisfaction is also correlated with general life satisfaction; it is believed that the two concepts have a reciprocal causal relationship (Schmitt &Bedeian, 1982). Thus, it is unlikely that individuals can separate feelings about their jobs from feelings about their life in general. Indeed, Jamal and Mitchell (1980) suggest that individuals who do not satisfy their psychological needs in their work have a low or (at best) moderate level of mental health.

Several studies have reported relationships between job satisfaction and demographic variables. Generally, older workers are more satisfied than younger workers, and white workers are more satisfied than black workers. Research on the relationship between job satisfaction and gender is inconsistent: some studies report that males are more satisfied than females, some report that females are more satisfied than males, and some show no difference (Muchinsky, 1987). It has been suggested (Hulin & Smith,1964) that such discrepancies might result from the confounding effects of other variables, such as education, pay and job tenure.

Several researchers have tried to find the sources of job satisfaction for males and females. Job satisfaction is more strongly associated with social needs, task accomplishment, and job flexibility in women than in men; in contrast, pay is rated as more important by men than women. Married adult women may also experience role conflict that might influence their feelings about their jobs (Andrisani & Shapiro, 1978); many women may take less fulfilling jobs in order to reduce interference with family responsibilities.

If gender does relate to job satisfaction, this relationship might be partly explained by the mediating effect of another set of variables -- viz., individuals' reasons for working (especially in jobs where education, pay and length of employment tend to be similar for males and females). Because work attitudes are likely to develop during one's first few jobs, this study focused on high school students who were employed part-time. Given different societal expectations around work for men and women, it was assumed that female high school students would tend to work for different reasons than males. Since men have traditionally been perceived as "breadwinners" females might express other reasons (than merely earning money) for holding part-time jobs in high school. If high school females worked for intrinsically more satisfying reasons, they might also express more satisfaction with their jobs. Thus, the current study addressed three primary questions: (1) Do female high school students differ in reasons for working from male high school students?; (2) Do the two groups differ in satisfaction with their jobs? and (3) If so, are such gender differences nonsignificant when controlling for reasons for working?

Method:

Subjects

Results were based on a subsample drawn from a large, nationwide study of employees in fast food jobs (Charner & Fraser, 1984). Approximately 17% of all employed adolescents work in fast food jobs. In the larger study, a random sample of hourly employees on the 1982 payrolls of 279 fast food restaurants representing seven fast food chains was conducted; 59% of the sample was between 14 and 18 years old. Three mailings generated a 66% response rate. Subjects completed a structured questionnaire assessing demographic characteristics, family background, educational attainment and

goals, attitudes about work and fast food jobs in particular, etc. They were guaranteed confidentiality and received $5 in exchange for a completed questionnaire.

The present study used those 894 high school students who identified their sex, and completed responses to questions assessing their reasons for working and job satisfaction. Demographic characteristics of the subjects are presented in Figure 1. Fifty-nine percent of the sample was female

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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and 41% were male. Most subjects were white (82%) with some blacks (10%) and members of other ethnic groups (8%). The majority of sample members were in their senior year of high school (71%) with 29% in their junior year. Students were either enrolled in an academic track (54%), general track (32%) or vocational track (14%). Approximately 30% of the fathers of this sample had at least some college experience.

Measures

Past Jobs/Present Duties. Subjects were asked to check which of many jobs they had held prior to their fast food jobs (e.g., waiter/waitress, dishwasher, delivery person, etc.). They were also asked to specify which tasks (from 1="never" to 5="all the time") they did in their fast food jobs (e.g., sweep/mop floors, cook food, take orders,etc.).

Reasons for Working. Subjects were asked to reflect how important ("not important", "somewhat important," or "very important") each of the following reasons were for working in their fast food job: Have money for other things, experience of working, support self, save for future education, learn skills, parents want it, friends work here, and help support family.

Satisfaction with the Job. Subjects were asked how much they agreed (from 1="strongly disagree" to 5="strongly agree") with each of the following job satisfaction items: I enjoy working here, I am adequately paid for what I do, and I like my co-workers.

Skill development. Subjects were asked how much their fast food jobs had helped them develop business/interpersonal skills (e.g., General business principles, Inventory or stock control, Finishing assigned tasks, Getting along with co-workers) on three and four point Likert scales.

Procedure

Males and females were first compared on a number of demographic and job-related variables. This was done in order to see if this sample showed results consistent with previous studies. It was expected (based on previous research) that there would be significant gender differences in the type of prior jobs the adolescents held and present duties they performed in their fast food jobs. Thus Chi-square tests (comparing males to females) were computed on prior jobs and current duties. Hypotheses 1 and 2 (that male and female adolescents would differ on their reasons for working and on job satisfaction) were tested by t-tests on each reason for working and job satisfaction item. Bivariate correlations were computed between gender and reasons for working, gender and job satisfaction, and reasons for working and job satisfaction. Finally, in order to test whether apparent gender differences in job satisfaction could be explained by gender differences in reasons for working, job satisfaction items were regressed on gender after controlling for reasons for working.

Results:

Male and female adolescents did not differ significantly on a variety of demographic characteristics including age, last grade completed, race, SES, length of time on the job (the average was 10 months), whether or not they held a second job, whether or not they worked by special arrangement with their school, and type of school program. The two groups did not differ on future educational plans (with the exception of entering the armed forces, which significantly more males planned to do than females). The two groups showed a small, but significant difference in weekly salary, however, this was due to a small, though significant difference in number of hours worked per week favoring males (26 versus 24). There was no significant difference in hourly wage between the two groups (approximately $3.48/hour).

When the two groups were compared on past jobs and present duties, clear-cut significant differences emerged. Males were significantly more likely than females to have worked as dishwashers, buspersons, gas station attendants, grocery workers, stock clerks, cooks, delivery persons, and car washers. Females were more likely than males to have worked as waiter/waitresses, sales clerks and cashiers. Sex differences were also found in most of their current fast food job tasks. Some duties were accomplished significantly more by the male adolescents (cleaning equipment, unloading trucks, cooking food, training and supervising workers), some duties were done significantly more by female

adolescents (clearing tables, assembling orders, taking money, hosting, operating cash registers), and some duties did not show a significant difference in gender (sweeping floors, preparing food, ordering food, etc.).

Figure 2 illustrates the relative importance of the various reasons for working for all subjects,

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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separately by sex. Three reasons, working to save for education ($t=2.31$, $p<.03$), learn skills ($t=6.88$, $p<.0001$), and to gain work experience ($t=6.16$, $p<.0001$) were significantly more important for females than males, while one reason, working because parents want me to ($t=-3.51$, $p<.0005$), was significantly more important for males. There were no differences between helping to support family, support self, earning money for other things, or because friends work here. Females reported greater satisfaction on all three job satisfaction items; they reported enjoying working in the job ($t=1.95$, $p<.06$), being paid adequately ($t=1.76$, $p<.08$), and liking co-workers ($t=2.35$, $p<.02$) significantly more than the male students. Figure 3 shows the bivariate correlations between sex and reasons for working and job

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Insert Figure 3 about here

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satisfaction items.

In order to see if the relationship between sex and job satisfaction remained significant when controlling for reasons for working, job satisfaction items were regressed on gender after controlling for reasons for working. In all three cases, gender was no longer significantly related to job satisfaction when controlling for the reasons for working. For example, Figure 4 illustrates the significant bivariate

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Insert Figure 4 about here

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relationships between reasons for working, gender and one job satisfaction item -- "enjoy working here." Gender was significantly related to job satisfaction. In contrast, Figure 5 shows the relationship between

Insert Figure 5 about here

gender and job satisfaction when controlling for reasons for working. In this case, gender is no longer significantly related to "enjoy working here."

Despite the change in the significance of the relationship between job satisfaction and gender, the original gender difference was relatively minor. This suggests that perhaps female adolescents do not gain the experience and skills for which they are working. However, auxiliary analyses (t-tests) of gains in specific job related skills showed highly significant gender differences favoring females. This was true for the following items: General business principles, awareness of running a business, team work, being dependable, budgeting own money, following directions, dealing with customers, being on time, and saving money.

Discussion:

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Greenberger & Steinberg,1983), this study found that subjects' jobs (both previously-held jobs and current fast food tasks) were significantly differentiated by sex. Male adolescents tend to work in jobs, or perform duties that are more "impersonal" (e.g., cooking food, washing dishes) while female adolescents tend to be involved in more "interpersonal" activities (e.g., counter workers, hostesses). Girls also worked significantly fewer hours than boys, although there was not much of a practical difference between mean hours of work per week (approximately 26 versus 24 hours). In contrast to earlier studies (e.g., Greenberger and Steinberg, 1983), girls in this study did not report earning lower hourly wages than boys; the mean hourly wages between the two groups was virtually identical.

The first hypothesis of this study -- that male and female adolescents would differ on reasons for working -- was supported: Females were significantly more likely to report working to learn skills or gain work experience, while males were significantly more likely to report working because their parents wanted them to work. The two reasons favored by females -- working to learn skills or gain work experience -- were most related to job satisfaction items at the bivariate level. Thus, more internally motivated reasons for working showed a stronger relationship with job satisfaction. In addition, small,

albeit significant, differences were found in the amount of job satisfaction (e.g., enjoyment of job, satisfaction with pay, satisfaction with co-workers) derived by the female adolescents as opposed to male adolescents (the second hypothesis). Consistent with past research of adults (Landy & Trumbo, 1980), gender accounted for very little of the variance in job satisfaction.

According to the third hypothesis, the relationship between gender and job satisfaction would disappear after controlling for differences in the reasons for working, suggesting that gender would not have a direct impact on job satisfaction. Consistent with this hypothesis, the relationship between gender and job satisfaction did become nonsignificant when controlling for reasons for working; however, reasons for working also did not account for much of the variance in job satisfaction. The dramatically different reasons for which female adolescents in this study were working part-time apparently did not transfer to an equally dramatic difference in their job satisfaction.

This relatively minor gender difference in job satisfaction suggested that perhaps female adolescents were not gaining the experience and skills for which they were working. However, additional analyses (comparisons of gains in skills and work experience) showed highly significant gender differences favoring females. Surprisingly, although female adolescents appear to have some of their stated reasons for work satisfied, this fails to make a substantial impact on their job satisfaction.

It should be noted that this study's results are limited to adolescents employed in their first few part-time jobs, and thus, may not generalize to other populations or work settings. The extent to which these results extend to other part-time workers or other adolescent job industries is a worthy question for future research. This study's results were based on self-report measures, and should be replicated with more objective measures. Although this study supports the need to consider mediating variables of the relationship between gender and job satisfaction, other variables not measured in this study might show a stronger relationship to job satisfaction than either gender or reasons for working. On the other hand, it is possible that satisfaction of broader psychosocial reasons for working (e.g., to gain self-esteem, hold a position of responsibility, make a meaningful contribution to a workplace) not measured in this study, might better predict job satisfaction.

Despite the limitations of this study, it provides educators and school guidance personnel with more knowledge about gender differences in high school students' part-time jobs. School personnel

who counsel high school students around their part-time work choices, might want to emphasize (especially for female students) that their goals of gaining work experience might be realized. Nonetheless, there may be other important variables that will influence their satisfaction with their jobs.

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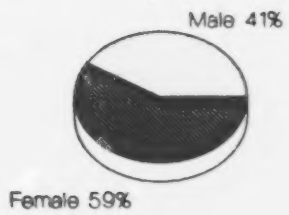
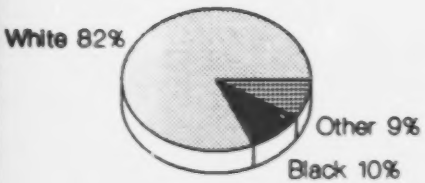
Demographic Characteristics

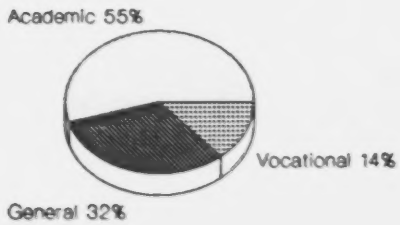
Sex



Race



High School Program



Year In School

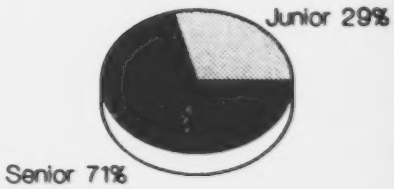


Figure 1

Reasons for Working
By Gender

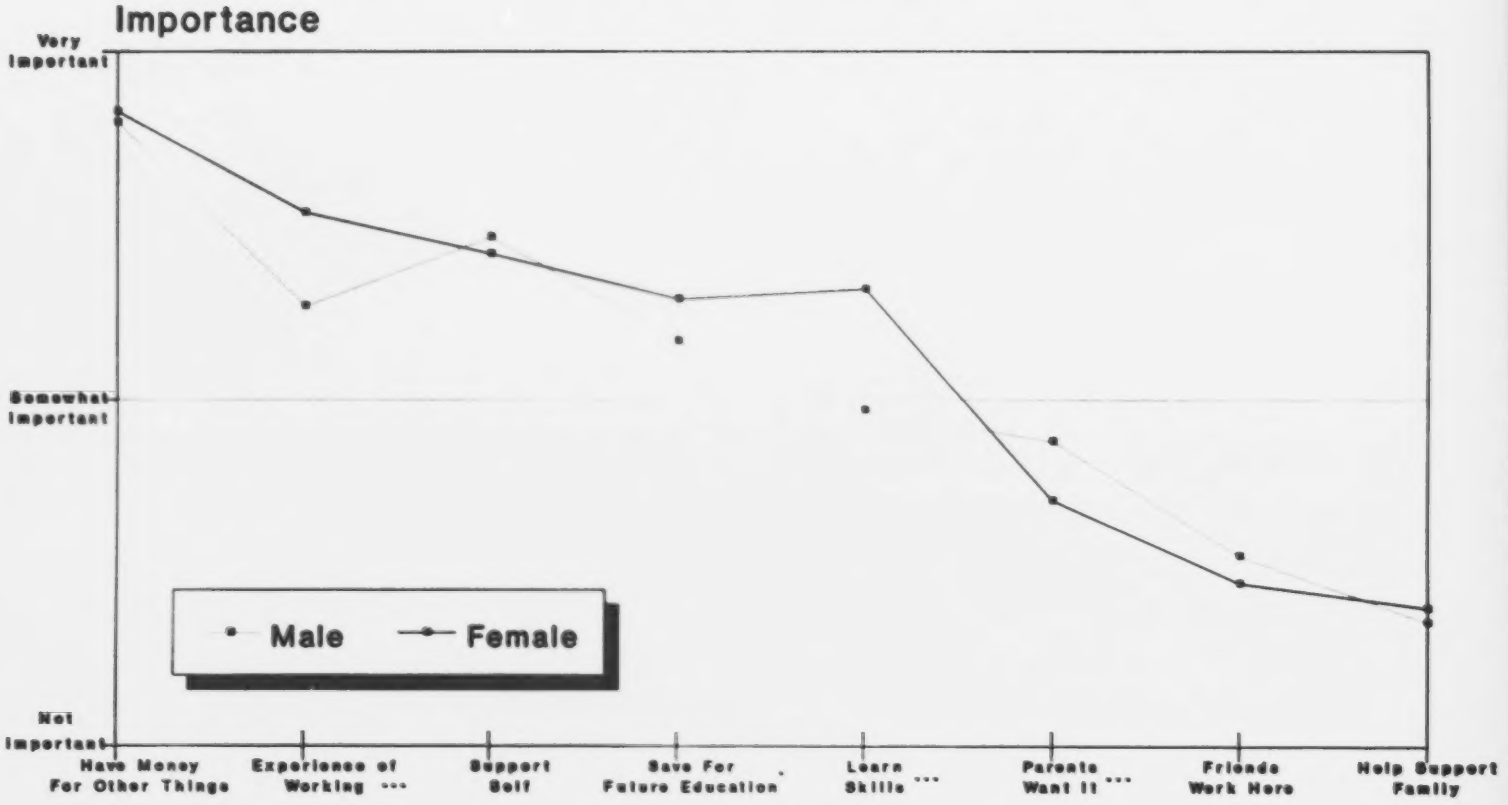


Figure 2

*p< .01; ***p<.001

Relationships between Gender, Reasons for Working and Job Satisfaction

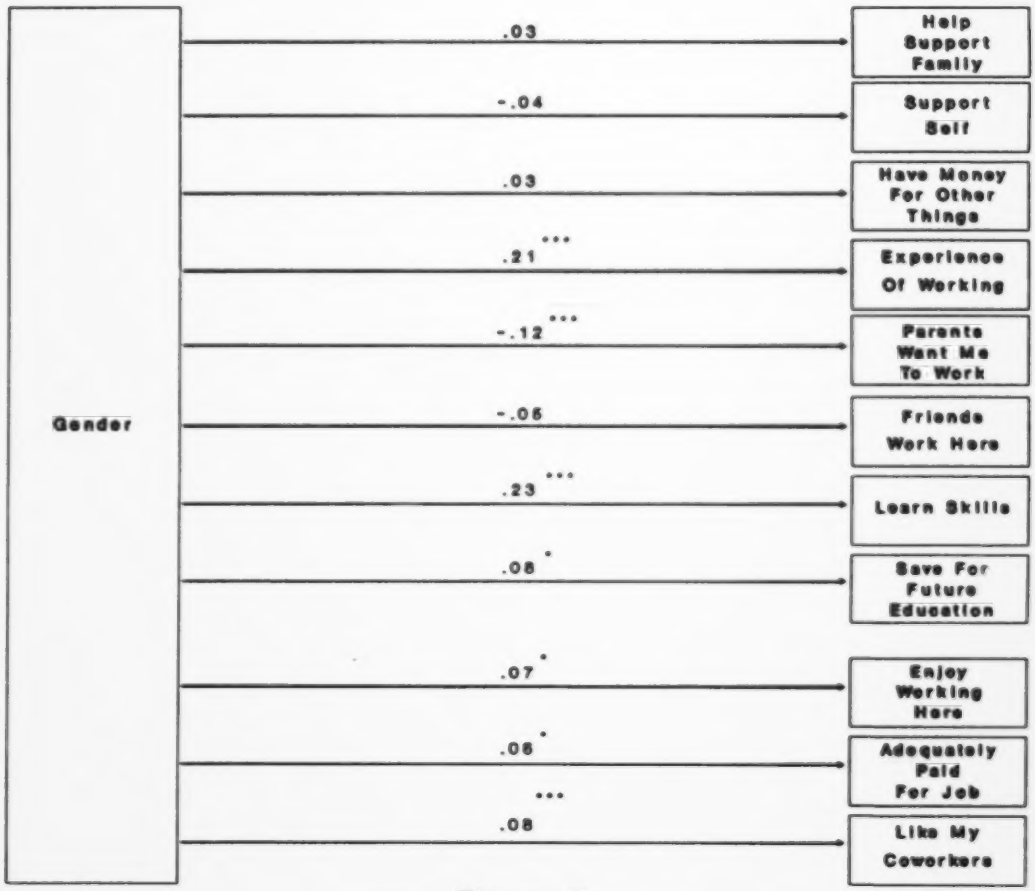


Figure 3

*p<.05; ***p<.001

Relationships between Reasons for Working, Gender and 'Enjoy Working Here' Job Satisfaction Item

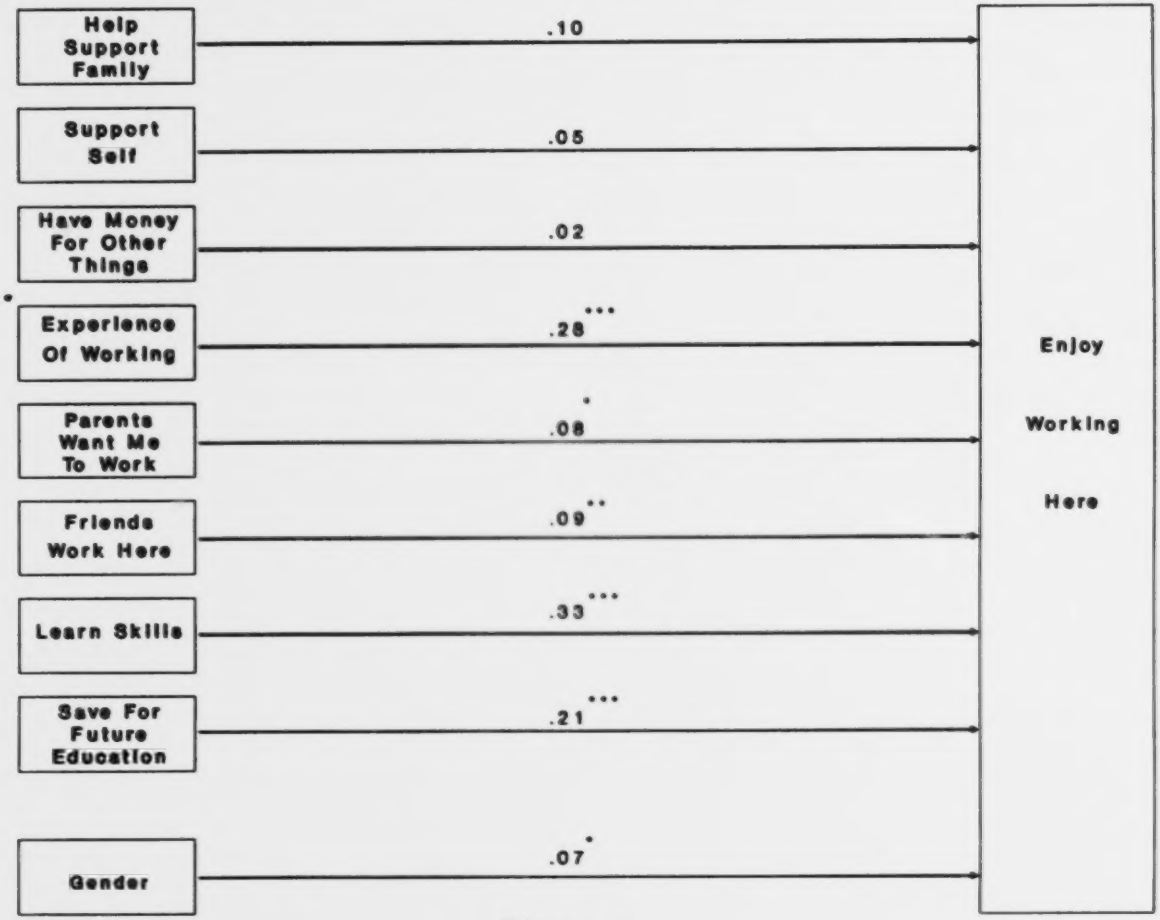


Figure 4

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Relationship between Gender and 'Enjoy Working Here' Controlling for Reasons for Working

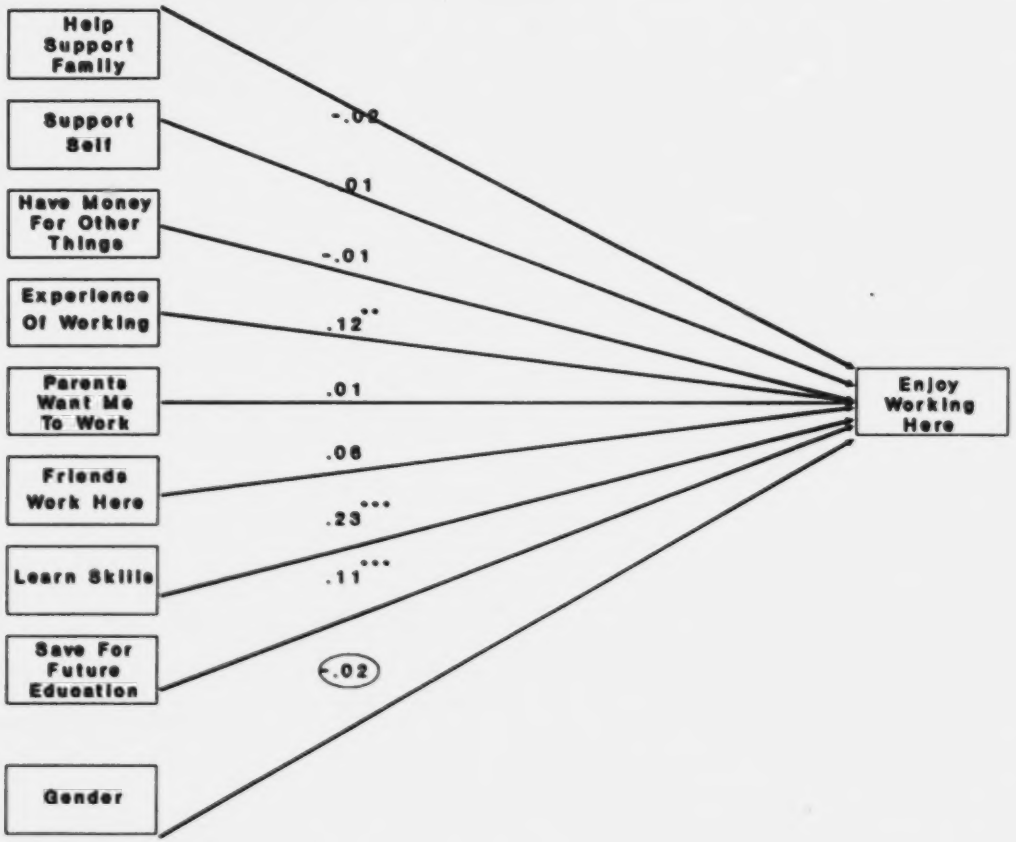


Figure 5

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001